

TUC Conference, September 1991

The following leaflet was prepared quickly for distribution during the TUC annual conference, held at the SECC in Glasgow, September 1991. It was handed out to as many delegates as would take it.

It was a typical sort of thing. No delegate wants to be seen not taking a leaflet. Some would be so engaged in conversation they wouldn't even see the leaflet being thrust under their nose, thus nobody would ever have dreamt of accusing them. Many took the leaflet as a matter of course, folding it in one easy stroke, pushing into the inner recesses of a briefcase, or deep coat-pocket (custom-tailored, after the fashion of an old-style Poacher's Pocket).

But many delegates were genuine in their response, taking time to read it - I recollect Clive Jenkins, looking much less robust than the fireball we knew from the television screen, he stood there until he had read it all the way through, then spoke briefly about it with us.

I should point out an obvious point, that like any such leaflet it was prepared to fit the specifications of a back & front A4 page, to be photocopied down for an A5.

**ASBESTOS: CANCER ON SOCIETY
HELP US FIGHT FOR JUSTICE**

Clydeside Action on Asbestos with its affiliated members throughout Great Britain, offers a counselling and support service for victims of asbestos-related disease. We receive no state funding but have to exist on donations. Every member of the group is a volunteer. Every member of the group is a victim. Last year alone three hundred people who came to the Glasgow office died of the killer disease.

At present victims and their families are living in a bureaucratic nightmare. Most of our time is spent battling the system. The DSS and the insurance companies; the medical and the legal professions are all geared to STOP justice being done. We have made recommendations to the different bodies that must improve matters and can be implemented immediately at little cost.

There is a sinister side and it concerns profit and greed. We further cannot underestimate the power and influence of those who are opposed to the claims of the victims of asbestos-related disease. The highest authority in Scotland is the Secretary of State, Ian Lang, yet he could have stood to lose personally through his past involvement as a "Name" at Lloyds if compensation settlements increase.

compulsory C.T. scans

Our immediate recommendation is that every worker in asbestos-related employment receives a C.T. scan. This provides conclusive evidence of asbestos-traces in the body and is the only 'proof' that truly satisfies the DSS who seem hell-bent on denying that workers suffer from asbestosis. Miners fought for their own medical procedure which includes access to the C.T. Scan: why should the same treatment not be allowed those employed in asbestos-related industry? In terms of social justice there is no distinction between silicosis and asbestosis.

widows are not allowed to grieve

We also need compulsory Post-Mortems for deceased victims. In the search for 'evidence' widows are forced to trace two former workmates from each place their dead husbands worked, in many cases having to go back over forty years. They must begin this detection immediately, sometimes the day after the funeral, otherwise they risk losing the claim on technicalities. In a humane society a family is allowed to grieve. Not in this country. By providing this one service an unimaginable burden is lifted from the families of deceased victims.

Society must face up to the fact that the vast majority of victims, and their families, are forced into poverty. Nothing can compensate for the domestic tragedy but recognition of the severe financial hardship placed on these families is long overdue. In a civilised society the least that should occur is the genuine attempt to maintain living standards. What we say is that the assessment body as currently constituted has no actual awareness of the living standards these victims and their families are accustomed; their background is middle-class professional and they have no experience of the socio-economic reality. Claims by victims must be assessed by a body of men and women who have that experience.

medical profession must change its attitude

Asbestos attacks the lungs, colon, larynx; stomach, chest and heart. The advanced stage of Mesothelioma has no known cure. Yet throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom there's NOT ONE solitary hospice. There are NO trained medical staff, NO specialist hospitals. At the very least the medical profession must learn to ask 'where do you work?' when examining patients who have clear symptoms of asbestos-related disease. At present they only look for what they call 'root sources', eg. tobacco smoking and alcohol abuse. Thus workers in industry are being victimised in a particularly harsh, often brutal manner.

Clydeside Action on Asbestos is a charity. We receive NO support from national government. The support we do receive at local government level is woefully inadequate for the mammoth struggle we're engaged in, in fact it's an embarrassment. Earlier this year the Sheriff Officers arrived to point out our 'equipment' for rates' arrears; this was before we were granted charitable status. But what we have is so grossly inadequate there was nothing to point out. When the Sheriff Officers

grasped the set-up they wound up putting a few bob in the "tea-jar", then made an embarrassed but hasty exit.

immediate support and solidarity

We need immediate support and solidarity from the Trades Union movement. We are all volunteers, ex-workers who have spent our lives in industry; and through no fault of our own we contracted this insidious industrial disease. This office and its affiliated members are THE experts for the whole of the United Kingdom. Our financial situation is desperate. Without YOUR support we cannot survive. The wealthy elite responsible for such untold suffering are using millions of pounds to bend the system and stop justice being done. To reverse the process the victims of asbestos must be given the means to fight, both in expressions of solidarity and donations of money or resources. Contact should be made directly with **Clydeside Action on Asbestos**, as also for further information, advice and support on asbestos-related diseases, compensation claims or cash allowances..